

Testing Prudence

By M. J. PHILLIPS
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Berkeley Marshall leaned languidly back in the dusty chair, doffed his feet to the bed and drew a ring of smoke, curlingward from his cigar. "I recapitulate," he began, directing his remarks to the calendar which hung on the wall and frost which stared back at him the face of a supposedly beautiful young woman with a frank and sunny smile, "your left ear is confoundedly out of drawing. I beg your pardon. I'm not an artist. I'm a civil engineer—or will be next June. And that isn't what I started out to remark.

"To recapitulate, I have peddled maps over three states, and the net profits of these adventures are \$331.62. I have a steady job during the college year waiting on table at three per and found. Furthermore, I have a dress suit and clothes and ties and things. Further yet, I have an invitation from my cousin, Torrence Marshall, to spend a week with him at Sylvan Cove, the sweetest resort on this little old ocean. It is now Saturday night, Sept. 15, and college opens up the 25th.

"The question seems to be shall I go on peddling maps and accumulating more filthy lucre, which I may possibly need; shall I go home, which is 300 miles away; to college, which is 450, or to Sylvan Cove, which is under a hundred and where pretty young women, it is presumed, abound?"

In due parliamentary form the Sylvan Cove question was put and carried unanimously. Whereupon the boy—he was little more bowed gravely to the calendar lady and thanked her for her kindness in voting with him. Then he ran down the stairs of the country hotel to consult the time table, for he was in a hurry to be off.

Marshall found Sylvan Cove in the elaborate simplicity stage of summer resort development. Everything was costly, but very plain, for the Cove was inhabited each season mainly by wealthy people who had become accustomed to their money.

On the first day of his stay Marshall naively confided to his cousin that he believed Prudence Fairchild to be the prettiest girl at the Cove, whereupon Torrence grinned and replied, "Stung, are you?" On the second day he learned that she could swim like a seal and golf like a Scot. That evening, by virtue of four dances which she generously gave him at the pavilion party, his stock of knowledge was augmented by the fact that Miss Prudence danced like a fury.

His approval of the tanned, red-lipped and wholesome young woman deepened during a long talk the next morning, when he discovered that her taste in books and tennis rackets was identical with his own. When Torrence informed him later, however, that her father, Rufus Fairchild, was credited with more millions than there were letters to his name the young man experienced a novel and entirely unpleasant sinking of the heart.

His own financial situation did not trouble Marshall—in fact, he found humor in his poverty. Marshall's father had been rich until an industrial flurry had left him broken and penniless. Berkeley himself, a natural engineer and in love with the profession he had chosen, felt the present stir of genius within him, vague but real. His teachers predicted great things of him, and with the knowledge of his own powers and his burning desire to achieve, fame and wealth were merely around the next corner.

Yet the fact of Miss Fairchild's wealth depressed him. "I've almost monopolised her since I've been here," he told himself, "and she'll think it's the blooming money. I suppose half this bunch that's hanging around her would marry a Digger Indian for the old man's pile. I wish she were poor!" The latter aggravated and sincere remark revealed to Marshall that he was dangerously near being in love.

A certain sensitive pride, for he had a morbid fear that his attitude might be misconstrued, kept Marshall out of the girl's presence most of the time thereafter. Maybe she understood, for the possession of much money often brings a woman bitter wisdom; maybe it was a feminine desire to repay him for his aloofness; at any rate, Miss Fairchild contrived to give Marshall a glance at parting, as he held her cool little hand, that tickled his every pulse. It was like the song of a nightingale or the scent of June roses. And the memory moved him again and again that winter as he built theoretical bridges in the class room or delivered vegetable soup in the hotel dining room.

Now, a look such as that from a girl who is not a flirt dwells in her memory too. Miss Fairchild's cheeks were hot sometimes when she thought of it and of the answering glance of bewildered joy that flashed from Marshall's blue eyes. "He might take advantage of it," she said to herself in brief, delicious panic when the invitation of a chum, Neil Burrows, to come for the January hop, of the seniors, at Marshall's college reached her. But she went nevertheless.

The assurance with which he confiscated five of the dances on her card at the hall showed that Marshall remembered. They sat out two, which was delightful, but dangerous. There was little said, and the silence between them was intimate and significant.

Removed from the din of the lights and the music, from the half-shielded promise of her eyes and the intoxication of her beauty, Marshall

was not satisfied. "If she were only poor," he repeated to himself. "How can she know that it's she I want, and not the money? Suppose that she thinks I'm a fortune hunter? And if the money makes any difference with her, then she doesn't care for me. I wish I knew. If you only could give me a sign, sweetheart, that you had faith in my love!"

It was luncheon, and Marshall was at his accustomed table in the hotel. His thoughts were broken by the coming of the door. Miss Fairchild and Miss Burrows came in. They were accompanied by Neil Burrows and Carrick, wealthy frat men of his own class.

Out of the corner of his eye, Marshall saw Miss Fairchild start a smile when she recognised him. When the party had been seated two tables away by young Condon, another student writer, the girl's back was toward him. He had given her no opportunity for a greeting.

For he had dashed over the young man that the sign, either of favor or of contempt for his poverty and his menial occupation, must be given. The girl would show whether her nature were gold or dross. If she were ashamed of him, if she left the room without a word, he resolved to tear the love he felt from his heart and trample it under foot.

Marshall never knew what he did before the crucial time came, the moment of the party's rising from the table after lunch, but no detail of what followed escaped him. He saw the amused lift of Bronson's eyebrows, the scowl on Carrick's forehead, and Miss Burrows' undisguised interest as Prudence Fairchild, eyes softly shining, came back to where he stood.

"If the mountain will not go to Mohammed," she said smilingly, "then of course Mohammed must come to the mountain. And I mean to quarrel with you some time for turning your back when I came in. But I shan't scold now; I'm leaving for home tomorrow, and I wondered if I'll see you again."

"I will call tonight to say goodby," he replied eagerly, "and I have something important to say, if I may see you alone. I think I've been waiting all my life to say it."

Her glance thrilled him as it had that September day at the seashore. "You may see me alone," she whispered.

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Marshall's Retirement.

In 1876 Mr. Dinsrell was raised by the queen to the peerage under the title of Lord Beaconsfield, and he left the house of commons before the news of his elevation to the house of lords had been made public. He withdrew from the stage where he had played so long the leading part in a manner obviously devised to avoid any sort of vacation was in accordance with the dignity which characterised the remaining years of his life after the defeat of the Conservatives, when the general election of 1880, in consequence of the Midlothian campaign, had terminated his public career. No applicant for his opinions on any subject ever received a postal card from Lord Beaconsfield. No speech was ever made by him at railway stations. He died in 1881 as he had lived—alone, a stranger amid a strange people. After his death his memory became to English Conservatives an object of almost sentimental affection; to English Radicals it remained an object of never failing animosity. But to Englishmen of all politics, to Conservatives and Liberals alike, his life continues to be a constant puzzle, an unsolved enigma. London Standard.

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Dated June 11, 1906.

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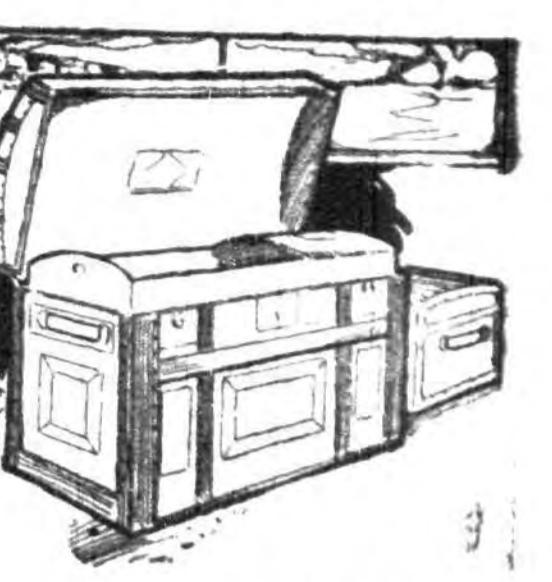
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